Community College Accreditation and Accountability Committee Report



Iowa Department of Education Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation

December 2010

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I. Legislation Requiring the Report

Section 311 of the State Government Reorganization legislation passed in the spring of 2010, which required the Iowa Department of Education (DE) to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the state accreditation process recommended by the Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee in its final report of January 2010. The legislation stated:

The department of education shall review and evaluate the implementation of the recommendations submitted on January 22, 2010, by the community college accreditation advisory committee in its final report to the general assembly. The department shall submit its findings and recommendations to the general assembly on or before December 31, 2010.

The original legislation, passed by the 82nd General Assembly of the Iowa legislature, mandated the DE to convene a working group to study the comprehensive community college accreditation and accountability review process. A process report was given to the legislature on January 15, 2009. The final report was sent to the legislature in January 2010.

Under House File 2679, the DE was directed to review the community college accreditation process and the compliance requirements contained in the accreditation criteria. The review was required to consider the following measures: (1) ensure consistency in program quality statewide; (2) provide adequate oversight of community college programming by the State Board of Education; (3) consistency in definitions for information and data requirements in consultation with the community college Management Information System (MIS) Advisory Committee; (4) identify barriers to providing quality programming; (5) methods to improve compensation of community college faculty; and (6) system performance measures that adequately respond to identified needs and concerns.

The bill also required that community college accreditation processes and system performance measures from other states and regions be examined. In conducting the review, the DE collaborated with community college accreditation and quality faculty plan committees, as well as with the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation's Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee. In addition, the bill required the director of the DE to appoint the advisory committee in consultation with the executive director of the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT).

II. Membership

The 2010-11 Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee is co-chaired by Dr. Roger Utman, administrator of the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation within the DE; and Dr. Patricia Keir, chancellor of the Eastern Iowa Community College District. The Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee consists of 15 members—one from each college representing the various functional units of community colleges such as faculty, human resource administrators, business officers, student services, chief academic officers, and presidents.

Membership was balanced between Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) and Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) institutions. These models are utilized by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in accrediting colleges and universities. The members who serve on the 2010-11 committee are as follows:

- Northeast Iowa Area Community College (Area I)
 - Lian Chee Wee, Provost
- North Iowa Area Community College (Area II)
 - Mark Johnson, Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Iowa Lakes Community College (Area III)
 - Mark Gruwell, Legal Studies Assistant Professor
- Northwest Iowa Community College (Area IV)
 - Jan Snyder, Vice President, Institutional Advancement and Enrollment Services
- Iowa Central Community College (Area V)
 - Michelle Ramthun, English Faculty
- Iowa Valley Community College District (Area VI)
 - Chris Duree, Chancellor
- Hawkeye Community College (Area VII)
 - Linda Allen, Acting President
- Eastern Iowa Community College District (Area IX)
 - Laurie Hanson, Director, Institutional Effectiveness
- Kirkwood Community College (Area X)
 - Kathleen Van Steenhuyse, Dean, Social Services and Career Options Programs
 - Al Rowe, Institutional Effectiveness (Representing K-12 Teacher Quality Requirements)
- Des Moines Area Community College (Area XI)
 - Margi Boord, Associate Executive Director, Human Resources
- Western Iowa Tech Community College (Area XII)
 - Helen Lewis, English-Humanities Faculty
- Iowa Western Community College (Area XIII)
 - Bill Barrett, Business-Marketing Faculty
- Southwestern Community College (Area XIV)
 - Barb Crittenden, President
 - Dave Neas, English Faculty (Representing Iowa State Education Association Membership)
- Indian Hills Community College (Area XV)
 - Marlene Sprouse, Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Southeastern Community College (Are XVI)
 - Joan Williams, Vice President, Student Services
- Department of Education Representatives
 - --Roger Utman, Administrator, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation
 - --Colleen Hunt, Chief, Bureau of Community Colleges and Career and Technical Education Services
 - --Jeremy Varner, Consultant, Bureau of Community Colleges and Career and Technical Education Services

IV. Recommendations

Since the filing of the January 2010 final report, there continued to be concern from the community colleges on: the structure of the interim and comprehensive accreditation visits to the community colleges, and a concern on the format of the written accreditation reports. Therefore, the committee again focused on these issues during both the spring and fall 2010 accreditation meetings and has revised the protocols and processes for the visits. An outline of the new process with a comparison to the old process is given at the end of this report.

General Comments/Recommendations

The committee is still committed to the following:

- The accreditation visits need to be more focused and efficient by reducing duplication of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools process.
- Through a review of HLC documents, determine whether any additional issues need to be addressed.
- Focus on the Iowa Code standards not covered by the HLC.
- Review the progress on any issues noted on the college's last state accreditation visit.

V. Structure of Accreditation Visits

Enhanced Pre-Visits

As part of either an interim accreditation visit or a comprehensive accreditation visit, the recommendation is to have an enhanced pre-visit. The pre-visit would consist of a review by team members of specific materials and documents which are currently reviewed while on campus. These materials and documents would be supplied by electronic means such as through college web site links and emailed documents. Data on student enrollment in campuses, departments, programs, and courses on the basis of racial/ethnic background, gender, and disability and each college's Quality Faculty Plan (QFP) are already on file with the DE and would also be reviewed as part of the enhanced pre-visit.

Additional Documents-Equity

While there is a separate equity visit at each college, there are some components of equity which are reviewed at the time of the accreditation visit. Documents dealing with equity issues would also be reviewed. Colleges currently have the option to have the comprehensive equity visit at the same time as the accreditation visit or keep it as a separate event. The committee recommends that the colleges continue to have this option.

Documents Requested After the Visit

While the HLC's documents and findings will be reviewed before (pre-visit) and during the visit, each college will need to supply a copy of the official letter from the HLC (Higher Learning Commission) on the college's accreditation status.

Interim Visits

In the past the DE followed the format of the HLC in determining when the interim visits to the colleges would be scheduled, based on the HLC model utilized by the college. Under the PEAQ (Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality) model an interim visit was at the mid-point (fifth year) of the 10-year approval and with AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program) institutions, the interim visit was at the mid-point (fourth year) of the seven-year approval. The committee is well aware that with some colleges utilizing one model and others colleges using AQIP (along with changes in the models used by HLC and where each of the colleges is in their process in responding to the HLC), it's become almost impossible to definitively decide when an interim visit should be scheduled.

Therefore, the committee recommends that the interim visit is consistently scheduled for **five years after the comprehensive visit**. In this way, it would allow the state accreditation team to concentrate on the progress made on the activities discussed during the HLC's visit and would not duplicate efforts. (For a college utilizing the PEAQ model, there is **no interim report** from the HLC of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Therefore, the visit would review code requirements and address any issues from the comprehensive visit report and any issues or concerns identified by the DE.) For the interim visit, on-site interviews would be tailored to specific HLC activities undertaken by the college. This will allow the accreditation process to be more focused, efficient, and a better use of resources. While the length of the on-site visit may vary depending on the college, by collecting and reviewing much of the written documentation in the pre-visit, the interim on-site visit can be reduced from the current three-day schedule. A schedule will be developed so all colleges would know well in advance when their next visit would occur.

Comprehensive Visit

Again, to provide for better planning and limit confusion, comprehensive visits to the colleges would be done on **10-year intervals**. By utilizing this format, it would allow the college to talk about the HLC process and any issues and receive input. In this way, it would allow the accreditation team to concentrate on the progress made on the activities discussed during the HLC visit and would not duplicate efforts. The length of the on-site visit may vary depending on the college, but by collecting and reviewing much of the written documentation in the pre-visit, the comprehensive on-site visit can be reduced from the current three-day schedule. Again, a consistent schedule would then be developed so all colleges know well in advance when their next visit would occur.

Written Report Format

In reviewing the formats for the both the interim and comprehensive visit reports, the committee is still committed to the following:

- The comprehensive report contains a brief history of the college at the beginning of the report.
- Both reports would address whether a college was in compliance with HLC (Higher Learning Commission).
- Both reports address any issues from the most recent state accreditation visit.
- Both reports contain a separate section which deals with compliance of lowa Code: for accreditation by the state board of education, an lowa community college shall also meet additional standards pertaining to minimum or quality assurance standards for faculty (Iowa Code section 260C.48(1)); faculty load (Iowa Code section 260C.48(2)); special needs (Iowa Code section 260C.48(3)); career and technical education program evaluation (Iowa Code section 258.4(7)); quality faculty plan (Iowa Code section 260C.36); and senior year plus programs (Iowa Code chapter 261E).
- Both reports contain sections which deal with strengths and areas where the college can maximize resources.
- At the end of each report, it would be clearly stated if there are any issues which need to be addressed before the next DE visit. If there are any issues which need immediate attention, the report would clearly state how the college needs to respond before a given deadline.

Additional Recommendations

- The colleges continue to seek and maintain National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) accreditation to ensure quality of concurrent enrollment programs. This would assist with lowa Code requirements under Senior Year Plus (Iowa Code, Chapter 261E).
- As assistance to the accreditation process, explore additional ways for the Management Information System (MIS) to collect college data through careful selection of data elements, reduce redundancies, improve clarity, timeliness and consistency of reported data, and improved external and internal communication on data.
- Continue to work on a web-based system for colleges to submit career and technical education programs of study for approval to the DE.
- The Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee will continue to work for the rest
 of this academic year on all of the details for the restructured visits to begin with the 20112012 academic year.
- Continue to revise the full guide on the state accreditation process and publish it to the DE's website.

Old vs. New Process for State Accreditation

Interim Review	Old Process	New Process
Site Visit Length	3-5 days	1 day (including initial report creation)
Interviews	Fifty (50) scheduled interviews with groups and individuals.	Very few; only as requested by team to check compliance with a state standard.
Desk Review	None	Review of all documents that can be reviewed prior to site visit.
State Standards: HLC	Evaluated by site visit team	Reliance on HLC to evaluate HLC
(Higher Learning	through document review and	standards; follow-up only on
Commission) Criteria	interviews.	significant issues. Far fewer documents and interviews required.
State Standards:	Evaluated by site visit team	Reviewed partly through desk
Additional State	through document review and	audit, partly through document
Standards	interviews.	review; interviews only if needed.
Timeline	Visit halfway between	Visit approximately one year
	comprehensive visits.	after HLC review.
Report to the State Board	Includes strengths and	Brief report with compliance with
of Education	opportunities for	HLC and state standards, follow-
	improvement identified by the	up on any citations from previous
	team for HLC criteria and	visit.
	additional state standards.	

Comprehensive Review	Old Process	New Process
Site Visit Length	3-5 days	2 days
Interviews	Fifty (50) scheduled interviews with groups and individuals.	Limited number of interviews to check specific state standards or follow-up on identified issue.
Desk Review	None	Review of all documents and that can be reviewed prior to site visit.
State Standards: Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria	Evaluated by site visit team through document review and interviews.	Reliance on HLC to evaluate HLC standards; check to ensure no significant issues. Far fewer documents and interviews required.
State Standards: Additional State Standards	Evaluated by site visit team through document review and interviews.	Reviewed partly through desk audit, partly through document review and focused interviews during site visit.
Timeline	Visit prior to HLC site visit.	Visit approximately one year after HLC review site visit.
Report to the State Board of Education	Includes strengths and opportunities for improvement identified by the team for HLC criteria and additional state standards.	Report with institutional history, compliance with HLC and state standards, follow-up on any issues from previous visit, special topic summary if requested by college.

Review of State Standards:

- 1) HLC Criteria—Evaluation team will review the most recent HLC accreditation report and other documentation to ensure there are no significant issues. Minor issues identified by the HLC will not be addressed.
- 2) Additional State Standards—Evaluation team will review documents and conduct a small number of interviews to ensure requirements are met. These standards include: faculty qualifications, faculty instructional load, special needs, career and technical education program evaluation, strategic planning, physical plant/facilities, quality faculty plan, and Senior Year Plus. Interim review protocol will not be as thorough as comprehensive reviews. Desk audits will include reviews of the college's quality faculty plan, database of approved programs, and all other documents that can be sent to the review team electronically. The Community College Accreditation Advisory Committee will assist with the development of protocol and provide feedback during implementation.

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